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A Field of Folk

Isabella Howe Fiske



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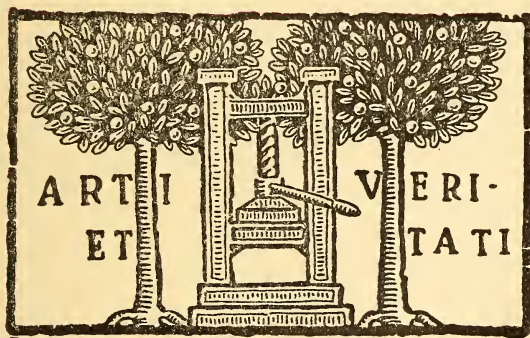
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Isabella Howe Fiske



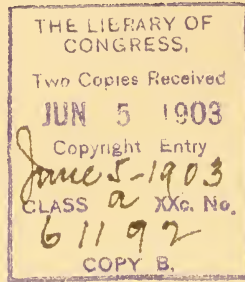
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To My Father

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A FIELD OF FOLK

Piers Plowman, hermit-robed, one May of yore,
 Stood on the hills, his soul at gaze to see
 Round Holy Church, fair Malvern's priory,
Outlying counties spread, his eyes before.
And when the vision passed, his waking spoke
Of a fair woman and a field of folk.

My hermit heart wins Malvern's hills to-day
 And, looking far afield on human life,
 Sees the same toil, still the same timeless strife.
And a fair woman stands midmost the way.—
Who has so climbed can scarce look out in vain
A summer season on the busy plain.

THE HERALD

The brook's a March-spiced messenger
With tidings of the victory of spring,
And all the eager wood-folk are astir
To hear betimes what message he may bring ;
With fan-fare and exultant shout
And boast in passing as they silent stare,
He greets the peasant fields about.
But when he nears his destination, there
At the wide entrance of the lake's demesne,
Where willows hold their court beneath the hill,
Breathless from haste and awed before the queen,
He kneels and gives his tidings and is still.

THE COMING OF SPRING

White flames of foam consume the meadow's strand,
Red waves of fire toss ebbing on its sand,
Spring floods and fires that, interfused, prevail,
And golden smoke along a sunlit trail
Where willows are as arras by the throne
That level rivers kneel before to own
Young April, consort of the sunlit morn,
Daffodil-sceptred of the crocus born,
Transforming youth's delirious early hours
To joyous metamorphosis of flowers.
And down the narrow and expectant street
The city casements open, Spring to greet.
Trade's wheels vibrate the slower, as, in dreams,
The tenement looks out on Arno's gleams,
And from far woodland glades the waters bring
The sweet and low compelling of the Spring.

APPLE-BLOSSOMS

SUNSHINE

A moving dome of fragrance, choired by the boom
of the bee,
Glow of the white and glow of the pink, soul of the
apple-tree ;
Sunshine a-riot without and the flicker of shade below.
Overhead in the blue doth God the fall of the
petals know.

IN THE RAIN

Not sunshine and not summer, but the morning of
a day
When the grass is yet drenched and the sun to
seek ;
Firm to the touch and wet to the cheek,
Half-opened blossoms in a March-like May :
To yield such sweetness sunshine strives in vain
As apple petals chilled by early rain.

MIGRATION

I would hearken and pass in May,
When the polish of leaves is new,
And the white clouds ride in the blue,
When the breeze is a song—a roundelay
Bidding me open the casement-frame,
Whispering an old and dreaded name
And blowing its fears away.

DESTINY

Slow-plodding horse-hoofs are the tramp of fate
To clovers, when the days of June are late
And a child's patter on the yielding soil
May crush a score of little lives that toil.
Yet gladly do I breathe the new-mown hay
And gladly listen to the child at play;
Here is no tragedy!—So does God smile
And watches you, your little busy while.

COMPENSATION

My little flower the wheel has crushed,
The wing of fate too strongly brushed
Your unresisting white, to-day
And thou wert plucked but to be thrown away.—
But I have held you in my hand this hour
A human heart has looked on you, a flower,
And has been made content. Is not that worth
The longer life of untouched flowers of earth?

Δείος Ποιήτης

When God writes sonnets for mankind to read,
The sky His octave is; the answering sea
Is the sextette:
When God of lyrics findeth need,
He makes the wind's white touch upon the lakes,
And all the shifting hollows of the tide
Beneath the west,
Rhyme with the sunset or the dawn that wakes,
And with the hills that linger, glorified.
Man's speech at best
Is colorless and set in black and white;
God speaks in hills and rivers, stars and showers,
In rainbow type,
Star-capitaled upon the page of night,
His folio is set. Yet 'tis of ours
The prototype.

AFTERNOON

O hill of sunlit hollows,
And long blue mists of shade,—
Like the low flight of swallows
Into dim substance made,—
My heart your beauty follows;
Forgets to be afraid.

THE TREE

I covet not to wander
Who hold far lands in fee.
For where I stand, unmoving,
The broad world comes to me;
Wide wanderers the breezes,
And storms from over sea,
Tell me their errant stories
And set me fancy-free.

The birds that haunt my leisure
Bring North and South anear,
And all man's purest thinking
Is done where I can hear;
Below the earth my fibres
Drink sea-hints, crystal clear,
And, white amidst my branches
New worlds of stars appear.

ADVENTURE

Ah, my strange morning—think!

I have witnessed a duel of warrior-birds
An unavailing second, and seen sink
To earth too small a combatant and brave

For death to single out and thus defy.

And I have knelt, with pitying words,
Human-incompetent to save,

At the passing of a butterfly,
The struggle of whose soft-hued wings
Grief to Elysium brings—

Have I returned enriched or bereaved?

For I have greatly joyed and greatly grieved.

REMONSTRANCE

You whose estates Philistine

Show a broad stretch of lawn,
Whose ostentatious crescents

Are on the blue prints drawn,
Have you turned the soil of a garden?

Ached when the day was done?
Cherished the gleaming color

Of beet-leaves in the sun?

—I venture that you do not know

The hearts of plants that for you grow.

AWAKENING

When daylight nears and darkness falls away,
Its dreams and imagery, too far and gray
For four near walls, are gradual-merged in light
And the room's objects enter into sight.
Bookshelves and curtains and soft-cushioned chair,
Statue and mirror and the like are there ;
And Andrea's Madonna meets your search—
As when the sacristan of some old church
Draws slowly back the curtain and, in whole,
Our lady of the sorrows greets the soul.

Soft-couched in heather in my outdoor room,
Its walls emerge four-square from out the gloom—
Book-shelves of boulders, mantel of the hills,
Mirrors of lakes, low chiming clock of rills,
The elm-tree's beauty, statued, nude and rich
Like the Apollo, glimmering in its niche :
And lo ! there comes the angel of the sun,
Dawn's master-piece of Mary is begun ;
White-clustered sunbeams in the east display
A new annunciation—one more day.

MOONRISE

Upon the star-set canvas of the night
That takes its values from a scale of dreams,
The moon above the hill rests, at the height
Madonna's head might reach—its circle seems,
The Tuscan halo of some spirit nigh,
Herself invisible—queen of the sky.

PRECIOUS STONES

Do you sing of the diamond and pearl
That are bought for the whim of a girl
And whose light the world-wise
Deem their uttermost prize?
I would sing of earth's pride; of the rock,—
Of man's vaunted jewels the mock,—
That adorns nature's breast
And whose shadow gives rest
To man, weary, alone,—
This is my precious stone.

ON THE RIVER

Thy siren-song is sweet, my tree,
I know thee for my Lorelei;
Thy hair is blowing soft and free,
 Its brown cones gleam amidst it high.
Here, have my soul! I fling it thee
 Nor would desire to venture by.
No sharper rocks can shipwreck me
 Than headlands of a sunset sky.

UNDER THE VINE

The garden has its square of sky,
Its line of hedge, its narrow walk,
Its shadow on the dial, late
And early long, and gone at noon;
There in its arbor linger I
To overhear its flower-talk,
Its young day-dreams inviolate,
No longer lived than month of June
And question of the stately yew
Have other hearts such gardens, too?

SOLUTION

In eager zeal I went about,
Anxious to work my problem out.
Neighbors were full of ready speech,
I learned a different remedy from each,
And therefore was the more in doubt.
At last I met your silence, O my Tree,
And it divined my need unerringly.

ELEGY

White chips are scattered on the ground
Where a king of trees has bled,
And, above the prostrate dead,
Ye hear the forest's funeral sound.

“Under man's hand powerless laid
Of our chief we are bereaved,
He the death blow hath received
From the cleavage of the blade.

“Firmly veined his limbs, and white,
Sinewed as befits a king,
Careful he of nests where sing
Now no more the plumaged-bright.

“Strong of branch and rich of leaf,
Clear of sap and deep of bark.—
Underwoods, we bid you hark
To our eulogy and grief.

“Others yet, of royal seed,
Bear even now the fatal scar ;
Mute the heavens above and far,
In our helpless hour of need.

“Housing man, we shall be trod
Under feet of pigmy folk.—
Better were the withering stroke
Of the lightning-blast of God.”

TREASON

Ensnared and over-bold,
In domino of black and gold
His intrigue masks;
He answers all his mistress asks,
Ah, the red lily's wiles!
I hear his whispers, see her smiles,
Ho! herald bee, here's treachery.
Affairs of state he clumsily
To his last chosen tells.—
Now yuccas, ring your bells!
Soon will the garden be alive
With the court secrets of the hive.

IN MOTLEY

The months its jester-guise adorn
In green, in gold, in flame,
With bauble of the ready thorn
It plays a tricky game;
The ever-blundering courtier-bee
That, tired of nectar-lust,
Desires its pungent remedy,
It chokes with golden dust:
Thus seems the barberry to be,
'Midst retinue of flowers,
Court-jester of the revelry
That whiles away the hours

THE HIVE

Above the meadow city
Have prelates made their home ;
Rich-costumed and sonorous,
They throng a mimic Rome :
The sunlit air, their Corso,
Their Vatican, the dome.

MICA

As by a rock I chanced to pass
Lo! a tiny looking-glass
Dropped, perchance, in flight and fear
When my footstep sounded near.
Have I made my heavy way
On the folk of the ballet
Dressing for the Vaudeville ?
Hark! Is that their laughter shrill ?
Ah! that I had eyes to see
All their hidden revelry !

METAMORPHOSIS

Tangible flush,
Audible hush,
Dreams incarnate,
Vermillion zest,
Pearls, magnified
Past estimate,
The clouds consort in the West.
In rapid change
Their fancies ride,
As manifold,
As metamorphosis of old,
An Alpine range,
Sleuth-hounds that track the failing sun
Till in full cry the pack's away!
Strange creatures and gigantic men
Wizard-faced, that shift again,
In some new, delirious scheme,
Till, the mystic sequence done,
Ashes of day
Burn low, night comes supreme.

AN APOSTLE OF THE OAK

I believe in the mighty oak
 Conceived by God,
 Born of the virgin sod,
Suffered the woodman's stroke,
Whose leaves were crucified
 By the frost's sting,
 And rose again in spring,
Toward Easter heavens wide,
At the right hand of Nature spread
 It heals the sick,
 Restores the quick,
And broods above the dead.
And in thy spirit mine believes,
 In temples of the catholic wood,
 Communion of the good,
Made audient in the leaves.
Then since new life thou hast in ken
 And pardon for who need,
 I face the east, repeat the creed,
And standing cry *Amen.*

YELLOW JESSAMINE

What the flower tells to me
I cannot show ;
Nor can North-dwellers know
How in the South, where hearts are free,
How in the South, where jessamines blow,
The air is loud with music, ear-unheard ;
Whose echoes reach me here and now,
And, whispering of flower and bird,
Do all the South repeat.
—Sounds to my distance bitter-sweet,
Exiles know how.

PSYCHE

What stands between us, thou and I,
Butterfly, floating by ?
Thou hast earth's joy ; and I, earth's pain ;
Thou hast freedom ; I, a chain ;
Withal, thou lackest the divine,
Yet have men made thee of their souls the sign.

PRELUDE

Oh, sun-bright lad, why didst thou hearken death?
Thy hope was young, thine arm successful strong
Hadst thou but once forseen how now to-day
What lack of thee thy hearth-side undergoes
And how the world was waiting for thy song!

So might the song-bird on his northward way
Mistake white orchards for the drifts of snows,
And turn again in sudden, swift alarm.
And they whose acres heard his lyric breath
Bear now the hush on the bereaven farm.

INTIMATIONS

Oh strong October, and oh gentle-souled,
Like some Norse hero on thy bare, brown arm
Thou wearest death's wide bracelet-band of gold
Red set in light of rubies; pledge and charm
Of immortality, an heirloom old
Thy talisman against life's old alarm.

ST. LUKE'S SUMMER

The mist that fills the hollows
Dims with its silvery haze
The willow's gleam, where swallows
Built low in summer days.—
A brooding curve that follows
The brook's leaf-dappled maze.

Above gray slabs it hovers,
Where man his dead enrolls;
The tryst of parted lovers,
Leaf-whirlwinds its patrols.
And mystic writing covers
Its monolith of souls.

HARVEST

In my October garden
I go to solemn mass,
As blithe and early risen
As any kitchen lass.

Dew-sparkles light the altars
In many a leafy shrine,
And to the glowing eastward
The rererdos of vine.

Before the bending corn sheaves
That take the virgin's shape
I taste in exaltation,
The eucharist of grape.

BETROTHAL

November is a sovereign, who weds his beggar-maid
He leaves his throne of autumn gold, to greet
her trembling there
And though she is in russet garb so shabbily arrayed,
He loves her for her gentleness and the sunshine
on her hair.

NUPTIALS

A slow processional of hills
Moves down the aisle of sky,
The church is filled with stirring trees
That watch the bride go by.

Her wedding veil's a haze of cloud ;
The breeze, her Lohengrin :
November is the groom whose charm
Can Indian Summer win.

IN THE ARENA

The maiden, Indian summer,
Barbarian-fond of death,
Rules Nature's coliseum
And stands with bated breath
While forests don their death-robcs,
But hide their Spartan grief
And dress as for a pageant
Each timid, faltering leaf.
To them October's hemlock,
No sombre death-draught yields,
Where reds and yellows gleam within
The stirrup-cup of fields.

INDIAN SUMMER

Like a girl's soft-blowing hair
Is this golden-glinting air ;
Like the sweet line of her face
Are these dreamy mystic days,
Like the soft touch of her hand
Is the stillness on the land.

URN-BURIAL

October keeps the passing of her dead,
And all of kin are there ;—the autumn days
Sigh for the summer at her funeral pyre.
The flames creep out and up—first little tongues
Dart red and yellow of forked maple twigs,
And the notched sumac—here a flame of green,
Amid the brands adds its pale driftwood lights.
Until the winds set all the woods afire,
And hillsides and the rivers catch the glow.
—And when 'tis past, November's care shall place
The ashes in the silver urn of frost.

MATINS

Little transient on the bough
Joyous in November
Wherefore singest thou ?
Summer's fled,
Leaves are dead
Long ago ere now.
Springtide's dreams,
Summer's gleams
How cans't thou remember ?
Bird-soul, teach me how.

BLUE-HILL

An ocean wave the mountain seems
That leaps against the sky,
And on its slopes are all the gleams
Of breakers, running high :—
Dark blue, clear green, the myriad lights
Sea-tints and late leaves know.
And as the sea-foam, curving white,
I see its crest of snow,
That when the low sun shines its way,
Flushes and glows as sunset spray.

THE FIRST SNOWFALL

A white-robed line, the birches
To first communion go ;
One prostrate, ritual hour
Young celebrants of snow.

EVENSONG

A square tower set against the West,
And slender firs near by
Make the low crescent brighter
To the arrested eye.
God's best and man's together
Peace to the spirit show,
While sunset winds are blowing
The white dust of the snow.

SCOTCH INVOCATION

Thou of the sunlight,
Thou of the starlight,
God of the seasons
Teach me to know
How best to serve Thee
Morning and evening
Whether the hills wear
Heather or snow.

APOLLO AND THE CEDAR

Soft is your cheek, my Dryad,
Whose blush of rosy snow,
Greets the young sun's appearing
Above horizons low.
Ah, who can guess the wonder
That trees at sunrise know?

THE GLACIER

✓
'Mid earth's white pyramids steadfastly set,
I, nature's Sphinx, superior to time's stings,
Am prison of creation's hidden things
That cannot forth to light for ages yet.
Man's day shall pass as a quick-closing door,
Whose forty centuries are to me no more
Than is his own ephemeral violet.
God's methods only I can know,
Who saw earth's mighty embryo ;
A silent keeper who cannot forget.

Great forces battle, heart-deep in my breast,
Where are within me chained the souls of streams
That struggle sunward with prismatic gleams
Of captive colors yet by man unguessed ;
My deep ice-molecules, bound each to each,
Whose myriad passions strain for speech,
Hold all the sun-flames of the east and west,
And these are kin to that day, centuries-slow,
When God spoke mightily, and it was so,
And the world moved from chaos into rest.

Into earth-anarchy these yearn again
But only sunshine can unlock the gates
Where the ice-torrent, ever baffled, waits
In April's leash, and frets his straining chain.
Down in the vale the peasants care to know
Not if the sun be shining high or low,
But tell the hour by the stream's wax or wane
And, seeing me, whose presence does not fail,—
Their great, stained, eastern glory of the vale,—
They praise God's house for such a window-pane.

Who deems man's fashion can supremely hate?
Quick-sinewed, time-untaught to harbor harms,
His deed must out, for fear his passion calms
I, ice-enduring, centuries can wait
In hate's white essence, though I seem to smile
Or love, unurgently, an aeon's while.
I could teach man to be all-passionate.
And it may be, when the sun's heat burns low,
That men shall warm them at my deep-set glow,
Of ice fires that shall not, like suns, abate.

A TRUCE OF GOD

Gone is the time at last, and the encounter done ;—
Since the foe is outcast, since now my soul is won,
Was it that years went past, or was it one ?
Ask of the sun.

After the storm at sea ride waves to shore,
Until old landmarks be beacons no more,
Can the 'longshoreman see life as before,
When wreck is o'er ?

They who recruit not cry, "Self is immune,
Sea-depths are unstirred by winds from the
dune."—

So might the lark deny earthquakes, rock-hewn ;
Mid-winter, June.

Yes, 'tis the inner shock teacheth man God,
How of the veined rock knoweth the sod ?
Miracle laughs at mock. At the priest's nod
Wakens the rod.

Yield Thou some countersign lest mortals fail
To know the true divine. What can avail
If he asks dregs for wine, tinsel for mail ?
Thy face unveil !

God, Thou art far to seek; answer the human !
Is the man strong or weak that yearns to woman ?
Must the soul hush or speak, shun or court no man ?
Prize friend or foeman ?

Ah, but Thou, too, wast lone—sought out the
earth,
If then in heaven was known infinite dearth ?
God one with man has grown, all his faith worth,
Since the Christ's birth.

After the siege is o'er, white shines the truce.
Saved from a reef-bound shore, hark to the crews
Setting the sail once more. Who could refuse
This, the Christ-news ?—

ISOLATION

There is one ultimate word,
One inmost sense of life
In each unconscious human soul ;
Its sense of self, its unknown name divine,
Such words make up the wondrous whole
Of God's great speech, but none have heard,
Self, nor intimate, nor wife,
One such soul-name, yours or mine.

“I HAVE CALLED THEE BY NAME”

In his all-comprehending hall of fame
For each of us God has a separate name ;
A strange, true summing of the all in each.
Not as we would to men another teach
By saying “He is honest, he is wise,”
Or, “ He is selfish; him you may despise ”
Naming thereby one trait, and in our screed
Miscalling that the man himself indeed.
In God’s rich speech a syllable can show
More than the learning of our folio,
Or sum a life in all its strength or ill,
Its poverty or riches of the will.
That will be all our judgment on that day
When we have put aside earth’s speech and way.
—So live that when the roll is read above
It shall be some derivative of love
That thou dost hear the while He looks on thee
From the great muster-call of deity,
And for thy new soul name there shall be shown
Some welcome patronymic of his own.

TO MY HORSE, "CHEVALIER"

Chevalier, that speedest well,
Quick of instinct to foretell
How my thoughts would bid thee go,
Or if faster, or if slow
Sure some soul in thee must dwell !

When fear casts its sudden spell,
And white rocks to monsters swell,
I will cheer thee, speaking low,
"Chevalier ! "

Ah, within thy rider dwell
Fears he, too, cannot dispel,
Sudden things that shadows throw
On a path he does not know ;
Can he hope thee to excel,
Chevalier ?

SMOKE

I am the scroll of history for every land and age,
And mark the progress of the race throughout its
pilgrimage ;
The camp-fire of the savage ; the tribal signal light ;
The city's conflagration that rides the winds of
night ;
The industry of river-towns ; the onrush of the
train ;
The massacre of battle ;—and the hearth-light once
again.

FOREBODING

Oh musing child without a city wall,
Dost thou of thine own future dream at all?
And from these bright-hued flowers turn thine
eyes
To witness what on yon green hill shall rise
And what the way thy feet shall then have trod?
—Ah little, lonely, waiting Son of God!

INSULAR

In a vast æther sea the planet swings,
Inhabited by idlers, slow to rouse,
Who dream they are the only race of men;
Yet are they dotted on the map of worlds
As but an uncouth, late-discovered folk,
Unnoteworthy, since, systems yet beyond,
There loom the proudly-peopled continents.

ELEMENTS

Who would have dreamed the world?
Thus intricate from chaos hurled.—
Mountain and sea and berry,
Man and woman and city;
A smile to show one is merry,
And a tear to offer one's pity,
Yet is our human progress slow
Since heaven on earth we do not know.

IN FLORENCE

Above St. Mary Flower
The Campanile's grace
Achieves the vision tower
That lit Giotto's face.

All dreams find incarnation
That shirk no sacrifice,—
Man's, of self-exaltation;
Jehovah's, of the Christ

SONG AGAINST LOVE

Love, I'll have no more of thee,
Since thou canst unworthy be!
Fair words, unfair deeds are thine,
I'll no longer at thy shrine
I'll to service, right the wrong
I'll to duty, with a song.—
What is this? Love, art thou here?
Then thy name I will not fear.

HOMESPUN

I sit within my oaken loom,
And homely is the web I weave.
I press the treadle. To and fro
The high cross beam swings. Even so
Our heavy fates move, I believe,
At our own touch our joy or doom
Nears, stays and passes. God must know—
Who bids the useful colors grow.

COUNTERPOINT

Songs of men are clarion ? women sing in minor ?
Turn the music of their lives the truth of this to
see:

Man's birth is of earth's soil ? woman's is diviner ?
In the fragrant, sunlit fields of life's anthology
Float her moth-desires, in quest of nectar ever
finer,

Æther-sprung, above his bloom spread unaspiring-
ly.

✓

LIMITATION

Not those that are bird-throated
Yearn most of all for song,
The weak are cognizant of strength
As never are the strong.
Refusal may be best of gifts
To who divinely long.

SONG

Rocks and sands and a shining sea,
Dashing surf and a sheltered lea,
Ebb and flow,
Sails that go,
What is the chorus ye sing to me?

Masts in the harbor, beneath the down.
Fisher-faces, rough and brown,
Sunset red,
Hill of the dead,
Fateful heavens that smile and frown.

OFFERTORY

Too tarnished is the ostentatious weight
Bestowed by him who harbors pride and hate;
The while the child's coin from a pure heart given
Becomes a very argent gate of Heaven.

THE CITY ON THE HILLSIDE

Straight and slim the headstones stand;
The clustered chimneys of the underland.
And, as from city dwellings men descry
The thin white smoke stream upward to the sky,
So souls, like smoke from fires just begun
Perhaps rise from this city, one by one.

THE FACE OF MAN

The face of man I watch in light and shade,
Its changeful features in the balance weighed
With here their heaviness and here their grace,
And as its ancestry perforce I trace
I am made glad at heart or shrink dismayed.

What wildwood joys these curving lips invade?
What city wrongs have made these eyes afraid?
I read as very history of the race
The face of man.

Pre-human life its early part has played,—
Fauna and flora mystically arrayed
In ordered sequence up to latter days,—
Working for aeons in untiring ways
God hath not yet into His likeness made
The face of man.

HORIZON

Ah world, thou art fair, sang the lark, who knew
The breath of a dome of spreading blue.
Oh world, thou art fair, the lover cries
To the firmament of his lady's eyes.

SLEEP

Along the sinuous shore of dreams
The tide is passionate,
And on its crest my being seems
To ride elate ;
Tossed and blown where its surges go
No more the bounds of earth to know.

The passion of sleep is spent,
Torn is its web,
Like seaweed drifting sent
On tides at ebb,
My ken of self recaptures me
And the dawn upwakes from the sea.

THE KING IS DEAD

His majesty has bowed before
A greater majesty,
For death, the king has come to bring
The King of king's decree.

INSPIRATION

Man shall not live by bread alone nay, but so as
by fire,
Without such he were breadless and chilled his
life's desire
Lit by the human hand-touch, whose hidden fires
astart
Can set the flames at ravage in the bracken of the
heart.
And though time bid them smoulder in anthracite
control
Mined of the silent ages, red hot shall glow the
coal.
Yet the heat of the red is as nothing beside the
heat of the white,
And the holocaust of the spirit flames in the
zenith's height.
Blow, winds of heaven, upon such and scatter it
afar
Till the fire-brands of its burning make dull the
solar star
It needeth the other fires as the fuel for its flame
And, walking unhurt amidst it, the prophets know
its name.

VIGIL

The mind its hilt, the heart its blade,
My sword of life hangs strong, hangs bright.
It flashes in sunlight, gleams in shade ;
Above the altar there stirs a light
As I kneel and pray to the Holy Maid—
Oh teach me, Mary, to wield it right !

I stretch and bare thee my sword-arm
Be it sure, be it strong to fight, I breathe,
And when is past the scathe and harm,
Be it wise again the steel to sheathe,
And gently to soothe the soul's alarm
As I march the banner of peace beneath.

KNIGHTED

Her love-filled life, held up
By a form, spirit-pale,
Is to his heart its altar-cup
Its vision-Grail.

FROM THE GHETTO

He treasures the darkness of days gone by
For the only light of his inner eye
Set between dark and dark he stands,
Forever placed in alien lands ;
And they who have his birthright so despised
How shall their daily insults teach him Christ ?
He clings the closer to an outworn creed
Within his Ghetto walls of scorn and need.

CIRCUMSTANCE

Beneath the dull eaves of a tenement
My window crouches ; your commanding towers
Look out on fields aglow with sun and flowers
If thou on deeds of light ; I, of the dark am bent
Let God be judge, who chose our firmament ;
Yours, sunlit ; mine beset with smiting showers ;
Mine hid with roofs and yours, star-evident:
To judge alike such alien lives as ours
No creed persuades me can be God's intent.

THE CITY STREET

The city street is sprung as wrong from right
How came this thing from God's, "Let there be
light?"

Whose rays, that yet we see each morn unfold,
Once from the new-set planets aureoled
Looked on a world unpeopled, pure of night.

Four-footed life learned how to stand upright
And climbed up nature's stair to manhood's height
Nor knew as yet the evil power of gold,—
The city street.

Narrow and dark where God's are broad and bright
Man's thoroughfares flush red and shrink from
sight.

Is this our boast ; this tale too plainly told ?
'Tis tarnish on our glitter and foul mold
On our first fruits, who for green fields behold
The city street

THE TENEMENT

I was God's cube of light and air
 Wandered of breezes through,
Builded by Him foursquare
 And roofed by a bound of blue.
And the echoes said when the work was done
"Thou art made that man might behold the sun."

Ye have bound me with fetters of brick,
 And pierced my heart with a stair
And the clamor of crime and the unwatched sick
 That starve for the gain of your pride are there,
"We have need," ye said, "of this empty space
To be the home of our serving-race."

I reckon no ill ye have done me here,
 But to your poor and the God of such,
Take heed lest the contract cost you dear
 Who count your gains yet lose overmuch
Ye that have walled away the light
Must marvel not if there falleth night.

DWELLINGS

The hillside bears its burden
No less than city street,
And yet old stony pastures
Are softer to the feet
Than heated city pavements,—
Could this tall tenement
Speak some remote old homestead,
Then back and forth were sent
What ken of human nature!
Home were in either one
And yet how life grows fevered
With lack of air and sun!

TOWN AND COUNTRY

Squalor of city alleys
Makes human life seem mean,
Yet are not upland pastures
Where cattle graze, unclean;
Man may be worse than bestial,
Farmyard more pure than town,
And the great eyes of oxen
Might look a monarch down.

WHERE CHILDREN PLAY

I rode one day in my carriage
Down a street where children play,
And the horses sped, for the hour had fled
And I feared to be late, since on the grass,
Long shadow lines began to pass
And the gothic elms were gold with the sun
That gleams in their aisles when the day is done
And the children's eyes alight with its strength
As they hushed their shouts for a moment's length
Till the echoes died from the hills away,
Down the street where children play.

I rode one day in my carriage
Down a street where children play,
And the horses sped as those that fled
When fear and evil and ill gave chase—
And I turned away; I could not face
Their noisy sport for the sudden shame
Of the evil things we dare not name.
Yet they watch, wide-eyed, in the sordid streets,—
Children, whose every playtime greets
The squalid fates that make their way,
Down the street where children play.

THE FABRIC OF THE FIELDS

The whole white of the prism-edged clouds, the
whole blue of the sky,
I would they were mine to merchant, that you had
the power to buy,
I would I could purchase for you the murmur of
forest trees,
Then would I station my booth at a city's kerb and
cry,—
“Ye that can boast at best but a withered square
of blue
Lo, here is a dome of it, free, for the coin of a plea
from you,
Ye whose despair crieth faintly, Water, water, I
thirst,
Come to my sunset acres, drink of their cooling
dew.”

Ah, could I weave you the meadows, could I but
deal in June,
Vender of leisure and quiet, crier of river and dune,
How would you, stifling and pallid, crowd from your
alleys to see,
How would I offer my wares without price in a
sordid noon.
Oh bodies, too bestially herded, oh souls that look
out as through bars,
How can the squalor of pavements guess of the
glory of stars?
Come and recapture your birthright; learn from
your blatant streets,
It is only God that maketh and only man that
mars.

SIDNEY LANIER'S FLUTE

Wrought by man's hand, beyond my power of
choice.

A master's fingers made my music whole;
Lanier's life-breath granted me a soul;
I have constrained an audience to rejoice
What days he smiled at laughter of his boys,
Or taught it tears, when into me there stole,
His wife's unspoken sigh, her dear control
Of tears, by love withheld from eyes and voice.

Striving to comfort, I have known his touch
The oftener for too poignant need of bread
In early, urgent days in Baltimore;
And yet again been plaintive overmuch,
My music from a vision-haunted bed,
The prescience of a surely-closing door.

PINE-WOODS

You ask me to portray the forest pines,
That were to undertake the human heart,
So does it of their murmurings seem a part,
So well the wood the need of man divines,
That were to limn the mountain range that shines
And all the glories of the surf impart.
You ask a master-touch, unerring art,—
No better theme had ever sonnet's lines.

Oh songful glooms, where glints the low red gold,—
Hem of the mantle of the passing Lord,—
Oh peace that ever here is manifold,
Oh slender needle-notes, in minor chord
Upon earth's score close-written for an old
And many-manualed infinite keyboard.

WACHUSETT

Wachusett, I am home when at thy door
That opens outward to the land and sea,
And bids me scan years that are yet to be,
That opens inward on what is no more
And shows my fathers in their days of yore.
Their southward-facing homesteads, field and tree,
Whose toil, decreeing that their sons be free
Gave liberally from out a hard-earned store.

Thy far, free foliage, or sky-touched snow
Beyond our cities takes a cloud-drawn breath,
Teaching our dun-color to know thy blue,
God's touchstone, keeping our faint struggle true.
Amid our share of pain, our hint of death
Whose eyes must watch the old time generation go.

NEW ENGLAND

A scanty income from the hills is thine,
In stubborn conquest of unyielding sod;
The wage of men that went rough-clad, hard-shod
Yet are to-day a corner stone and sign.
They who saw massive roots of trees entwine
Dividing bowlders fast beneath the sod.
And thereby gathered patience talked with God,
Unconscious-yearning towards things divine

Fitly from prophet and from patriarch
They named their sons, however grown uncouth
And, as relentless as the plow-share's mark,
Furrowed the discipline of work in youth,
And now, with fibre of the trunk and bark,
A race stands heir to God's wide-acred truth.

THE ORGANIST

The music surges outward from the keys,
To my desire my fingers speed seems slow
For I would teach the dim-lit church to know
The soul of winds that bend the forest trees
And hollow out God's open palm of seas,
Whose errant listings wander to and fro
Upon the earth and blend, majestic slow,
In chords that echo matchless harmonies.

The music stills—the audience stirs and sighs
In mute response, as from a single heart
Though myriad heard the songs that were it sung
For one has journeyed other lands among.
One has in his own future played his part,
And one has looked in his dead sweetheart's eyes.

THE CHAMBER OF LIFE

Pervading dark, with points of lesser dark,
And objects dim, well-known in light of day,
An open window wherein finds its way,
The gleam of stars, a hush that bids me hark,
While on my hearth there glows a fading spark;
I watch its pulsing till my senses sway
And sleep enfolds me until dawn of day
Recalls me with the early singing lark.

My room of life encircles me obscure,
Suggesting forms known in some earlier light,
I wait the day that shall my eyes assure
Yet meanwhile rest and am content with night
So it prepare me better to endure
The morning call to come, the sunrise sight.

THE FLIGHT OF BIRDS OVER A SUNKEN SEABOARD

As in old days we skirted thy shore,
Now that the waters cover thee
Yet we fly over thee,
Faithful as aeons before.
Far out beneath the breakers roar
Does a shadow of our flight
Penetrate thy ocean night
Who art sea-depth that once with snow wast hoar?
We follow the vanished curve
Of thy coast where the savage played
Like a child among thy sands.
Tradition-led, we dare not swerve
And from our course have watchers made
Their maps of prehistoric lands.

A SEA-CHANGE

The sea's a master-dramatist of life
And writes its plays upon old vellum sands;
Its language one for howe'er alien lands—
Derelict spars with tales of shipwreck rife,
The melodrama of the fisher-wife.
Then, sudden smiling, on its stage of strands
It turns to comedies, joins lovers' hands;
Yet most it sings of human grief and strife.

Untiringly it toils, this Shakspeare sea,
Tho' never one were there to weep or smile
Its audient horizons circle breathlessly
Its shifting scenes of continent or isle
Yet though it boasteth immortality
"There shall be no more sea," it hath been said,
ere while.

THE CITY

Since man hath had of God green fields for home,
He hath made haste to stain them with his towns,
Since God's free air hath blown across the downs
It hath been tainted with the mono-chrome
Of trade's black breath that vilifies the dome
Even of the minster that but vainly crowns
The river-height, nor with its chiming drowns
The cruel wheels, the epileptic foam.

Not all Christ's centuries have set us free,
God's census comes that here shall, as of old
Find peradventure but its righteous few,—
And ye whose power is wrought of infamy,—
For those old cities, less defiled by gold,
More tolerable it shall be than for you.

TO INK SPILLED ON MY DESK

Ugly disfigurement and useless blot,
Had I indeed a ready writer's pen,
Thou mightest have been words to move all men;
I fancy thee perhaps some mystic plot
Once overlooked by Marlowe, or forgot
Within the Mermaid tavern, dear of ken,
And now in later fashion here again
Too human-hearted to have come to naught.

These are my dreams; thou merely art instead
Emblem of blunder, once more sent to shame
Me into better action when I think
That we, descendant from the fluent dead,
Potential immortality may claim .
In each dumb soul,—as in each blot of ink.

WHAT FLUSH MIGHT HAVE SAID

Have other dogs such mistresses as mine?
White-handed, gentle-voiced, so kind of touch
That I, who love the outdoor world so much,
Where nothing seeks my freedom to confine,
Would rather crouch within, nor think to pine,
If I can make a smile hunt down a tear,
Or, true in vigil offer my dumb cheer
As a dog may, before a human shrine.

But while I kept her door, a stranger's hand
Beckoned its sudden mandate, hard to dare;
I did my best, but could not understand.
And yet I think—if dogs man's joy can share—
That as I listened for her word's command,
So did she wait the footstep on the stair.

THE ARNO

Lovers of noontide did the Arno christen
The golden river of the Tuscan vale,
A ring whose flashing gem could all else pale,—
Florence, whose lights upon arts finger glisten
In lover's troth. Yet when the moon has risen
When Ponte Vecchio feels not yet its light
And Santa Trinita is newly bright,
Lung' Arno's windows whisper, if you listen,
Of azure-silver. Day's dull, tawny gold
Falls off as raiment from a nymph put by;
The stream from which the lilies whitely rise
Flashes and softens as the hours unfold:
Gold is less precious from a full supply
And here old silver is the rarer prize.

NAUSICAA

A boy, at task beneath his tutor's frowns,
Aside would fain have his dull lessons thrown.
Scornful of classics, his eyes eager grown
For the broad window's glimpse of clamorous towns
When from the tangled web of verbs and nouns
A sudden comprehension came; there shone
White-armed Nausicaa, her robes wind-blown,
Upon the sea-girt margin of the downs.

I made my daily tasks of no avail
And all their teachings truant-wise defied
When sudden sprang from the else-idle tale
Thou my Nausicaa, by the full flood tide
Of my mid-morning's durance and the veil
Blew from my sight, and love stood defied.

ENDYMION

He walketh open-handed, open-eyed,
And by the door of the world's needs and woes
Keeps sleepless vigil. Therefore no one knows
That in a valley by a river-side
In dreamful sleep his soul to earth has died
Where to all evil things his senses close,—
He from the gods has won a sweet repose.
For they have loved him all men else beside.

You who amid earth's cities take your way
Yet pass the quiet valley where he lies,—
A youthful form amid the flowers and grass,—
Step lightly lest you wake him as you pass,
And see fear darken in his startled eyes,
In whose still soul Endymion sleeps to-day.

IN OMAR'S TENT

A little cup my life ; a beaker, thine,
Hold them aloft, behold them as they shine,
Each with its gleam, each with its mantling
foam.—
Knowest thou which holds the better-vintaged
wine?

THE HEAT OF THE DAY

He followed in his youth a radiant star
But now the years have set those days afar
For confidence to disillusion grew,
And he who glowed to make is happy not to mar.

BROTHERHOOD

Hast thou of God endured one bitter year?
Then look abroad upon the far and near,
And thou shalt not lament the destiny
That has to thee the human heart made clear.

A DREAMER OF THE GHETTO

I sing of morning stars and opening flowers,
God knows my life has kept the darker hours,
Yet even the shelterless in dreams may see
Against the east the sky-line of his towers.

ANNIVERSARIES

Events of years gone our hearts celebrate
With smiles or tears. Mayhap from Heaven's
gate,
Angels look forward on the deeds of men
And these betimes in song anticipate.

TREASURES OF THE EAST

Monarchs their gems on crown and sceptre prize
Ladies, their silks of myriad lavish dyes.
I, the poor sailor of a stubborn sea,
And clothed and crowned with each supreme sun-
rise.

RAIMENT

Look to the burnished moths, the autumn trees,
The wardrobes of the flowers and birds and bees,
Not all your factories of haggard men
Have wrought a fabric like to one of these.

RESTORED

My down-filled pillow will not bring me rest
Yet soft are tree-trunks and the earth's rock-
breast.
Dear mother nature, singing in the pines,
Teach tired towns to know thine arms are best.

IMMUNE

Out-doors, I know, there is no empty chair
To mock you with its endless "why?" or "where?"
Seek then those mates who only never die
Whose gossip is more prayerful than your prayer.

PARADOX

In prayer of God his happiness he sought
Urging whereof he deemed it must be wrought,
—Ah, the conflicting prayers of wayward men
That to be answered must be set at naught!

FAINT-HEART

There are who boldly woo and boldly win
And those who falter, as in conscious sin.
Ah, ladies, trust not to the outward show,
But rather look the faithful heart within.

CRISIS

By the electric hand of God drawn out,
From customary scabbard, lest it rust,
Into the thick of action and of rout,
A naked, quivering blade the soul is thrust.

ACTION

With some the sword of life hangs sheathéd still
Some use it as a foil to show their skill ;
Grasp thou its hilt and forth to civil war,
To prove its temper at thy captain's will.

THE KISS

A pretty passion of our infancy,
And mark of other lands' formality,
Thou art a master-linguist of all speech,—
And once wert man's worst deed of infamy.

CHARACTER

Χαράκτος

Oh furrow in the useful field of God,
With thy uprooted daisies in the sod
Cometh a harvest month which compensates
For ploughshares and rough horse-hoofs, iron-shod.

LEASE

Within four walls each life is resident
Wherein, my friend, shall thine and mine be spent?
For fate gives every tenant-soul its choice
Of prison cell or four-square firmament.

DEATH AND THE SCULPTOR

[DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH]

Absorbed, upon the Sphinx we labor all,
Deeming success within our early call—
Unconscious that the angel waiting stands
With signal that shall unexpected fall.

FOLIO

Oh book, bound in morocco, edged in gilt,
With man's short-comings, God's compassion filled,
The index thou of yet increasing works,
Upon the shelf of life that God has built.

IN THE VINEYARD

Art weak ? A little weight shalt tire thy hand.
Art strong ? A grievous thing shalt crush thee not ;
Art weak and strong ? Then shalt thou understand
And lend thy shoulder where the noon is hot.

DISASTER

Hooded, inert, and heavy on the wrist
The falcon broods, till an unblinded hour
Flashes a summons he cannot resist
And shows the frightened prey within his power.

MUSIC

Call me away from my labor, dear notes of the
vibrating strings,
Lending oblivion, granting to me of a bird the
wings,
Then my dream-poised spirit sing into strength
again.
Send me forth, never so eager, into the heart
of things.

A GUEST OF OMAR

All things of men and nature Omar felt,
Yet sang a mocking song the while he knelt,
A master of his craft, he wrought his tents,
And I awhile in one of them have dwelt.

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